

Dek Unu Magazine

Fine Photography



July, 2019

Rebecca Sexton Larson
"Narratives"

All Images ©Karen Hymer

Dek Unu Magazine

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Eleven

This is **Dek Unu Magazine**. In Esperanto, *dek unu* means "eleven." Eleven Images from a single artist. Eleven artists in eleven solo issues each year.

Dek Unu publishes the work of a new photoartist in each issue. The artist's work and words are featured alone and in individual focus as the sole purpose for each issue of the magazine. Unlike other arts and letters magazines which might look for work from a variety of artists to support an editorial staff's theme, at **Dek Unu**, theme and imagery are always each artist's own.

This Month

Rebecca Sexton Larson assembles darkly-romantic fantasy landscapes which echo familiar idioms, metaphors, and colloquialisms, teasing out levels of meaning that surprise, delight, and often provoke a chill. Her technical mastery of light and seamless compositions make her narratives ring true though they are very clearly quite impossible.

Hers are Images of loneliness and isolation. A glass house in a dark woods blazes with sourceless light. An empty apartment slowly floods with countless grey sunflowers. A couple of cardboard clouds hang in a deserted theatre. Her voice is quiet but compelling. Her touch is deft but distant. Her stories promise the moon.



In 2008, I unexpectedly became the full-time caregiver to ailing parents. Being an only child, I was their single advocate in medical, financial, and day-to-day issues. Devoted to the darkroom and the hands-on approach to picture making, I became faced with the task of creating photographs digitally while balancing visits to hospital appointments.

This was a massive change for someone that swore they would never make digital photographs. I was old school, with a traditional analog darkroom where I created large (3ft x 5ft images) black and white pinhole photographs that I would later hand paint. I would typically dedicate blocks of time (days) to printing, painting, framing, and exhibiting my work. In my mind, art required the hand of the artist involved in its creation in one form or another.

Can you put creativity on hold? Pause your need to create? Most of my "artist" friends, like me, maintain a certain degree of sanity through our ability to create. What happens when this freedom to create is suddenly taken away?



Black Hole

"Time cannot put anything in your hands until you let go of the time."

-Vishwanath S J



**“Every picture tells a story. But sometimes
it’s hard to know what story is actually being told.”**

*-Anastasia Hollings,
Beautiful World*



Every Picture Tells a Story



I usually start with an idea, phrase or quote and go from there. I will then look at various photo elements I have shot to see which ones will play nicely with one another.



Glass Houses

“A house with many windows witnesses many stories! Witnessing many stories means a lot of wisdom! A house with many windows is a wise house!”

-Mehmet Murat



Along the way, I can make 20 different renditions of an image, careful to step back and let the photo tell me what works best.



Float Through

“I am floating, I thought, completely without anchor, at the mercy of the wind.”

-S.J. Watson



You can't force something that is not going to work. Once the elements are in place, I will concentrate on lighting, blending, and details.

My biggest challenge is knowing when to say a work is finished. It is very easy to get carried away and overwork an image.



Three Sheets to the Wind

“If you reveal your secrets to the wind, you should not blame the wind for revealing them to the trees.”

-Kahlil Gibran



Early on in college, I had a professor who said I would never be a good painter because I was female and painted with the wrong side of my brain.

Of course, that was ridiculous, and, years after, we were represented by the same gallery. Later, in conversation, he remarked that he loved my work and painting style and never remembered making the comment some 20 years before.

“Never judge someone by the way he looks or a book by the way it's covered; for inside those tattered pages, there's a lot to be discovered.”

-Steve Cosgroves



Don't Judge a Book
by Its Cover



There was a period where my father was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, my mom was ill, and the world was becoming overwhelming. My father died, and soon after, his brother passed. Then my husband's sister died, aunts and uncles passed; we lost six close family members within a year. It was a lot to process.

Throw in there that my husband had a heart incident at our home that resulted in open heart surgery (he has a mechanical aortic valve now) and there just was not a lot of color in my life.

I may slowly work back to a more vibrant world, but, right now, it just feels comfortable working monochromatically.

“It’s one thing to feel that you are on the right path, but it’s another to think yours is the only path.”

-Paulo Coelho



Down the Garden Path



When I was a hopeful artist in kindergarten, my teacher became distressed because I would always color with the black crayon. The teacher went so far as to notify my parents of her concern. One afternoon while making dinner, my mom asked me about my fascination with dark drawings of landscapes and houses.

Without blinking an eye, I responded, "It is the only crayon they [my classmates] will let me have."

Crisis averted, I eventually would go on to use the entire Crayola 64 box (with sharpener) along with colorful paint, pencils, chalk, and other materials. - True story.

"Measure a man's worth by his actions alone. For the devil also promises the moon!"

-Avijeet Das



Promise the Moon



I have worked in solitude for much of my photographic life. I tried participating in a collective and found that it just was not a good fit for me. I currently have a studio and darkroom in my home that I love and, five years ago, my husband and I purchased an Airstream trailer (Studio Boxfotos) that we use as our mobile studio to travel.

I met my husband, Matt, in the darkroom in college. He is my best friend, trusted critic, and always the first person who sees my work. He is exceptionally technically oriented, and I am more spiritually oriented, so it makes for a nice balance.



Miss the Boat

“Solitude is not the same as loneliness. Solitude is a solitary boat floating in a sea of possible companions”

-Robert Fulghum



I always knew I would be an artist. Art was the one consistent in my life, growing up as an only child in a military family. We moved a lot, about every two years, but there was always art wherever we landed.



Set Up House

“What I wanted to do was to paint
sunlight on the side of a house”

-Edward Hopper



My advice to other artists? I would have to say... if you are passionate about what you do, don't take 'no' for an answer.

“Start by doing what's necessary;
then do what's possible; and suddenly
you are doing the impossible.”

-St. Francis of Assisi



To Catch a Man-Made Cloud



Interview - Rebecca Sexton Larson

Welcome, Rebecca. Beautiful art has developed from difficult circumstances!

I have been working on this series of images for almost a year and recently shared it with others this past October at a portfolio review in Durham, NC. Initially, I was somewhat apprehensive because it was a very new and different direction for me as a photographer. But the work was received with great enthusiasm and support.



You started out in fine arts as a painter?

I attended college at the University of South Florida in Tampa, Florida, where I studied painting. Horrified that I was going to graduate from college with a painting degree, my dad persuaded me to get a second degree. So I stayed around and completed a second degree in photojournalism. That was when I first experienced that 'ah ha' moment of seeing a photograph come to life in the darkroom. I was hooked and quickly knew I wanted to

print large photographs that I could hand paint, marrying photography with my painting background. Since I could not afford a large format camera after graduating, I began making pinhole cameras. The act of getting an image out of a detergent box pinhole camera was the start of everything photographically for me.

Having studied painting before being introduced to photography, in my current work, I strive to merge the boundaries between the directness of the photographic image and the emotional context of color and light found in paintings.

Your photographic craft and your creative eye are so sharp; tell more about your photo training?

College photojournalism provided basic darkroom skills, but a great deal of my photo training has come from reading. Whenever I have become intrigued by an image, I have gone out and researched the process. Along the way I have studied salt printing with Dan Estabrook, albumen with Mark Osterman, bromoil process with Jill Burkholder. All of my knowledge of digital techniques has been by trial and error. I have no formal training in Photoshop.

Was there a particular event that told you that photography was going to be your "thing" as opposed to the other media?

I would say it was when I was told that Graham Nash was purchasing one of my pinhole images through Eric Renner and the Pinhole Resource.

I wasn't really into music growing up and had to ask my husband who Graham Nash was.

You were a photographer for the Sheriff's Department and did medical photography at a cancer center.

After college, my first photographic job was with the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office. I was assigned to training and produced short videos for new recruits and deputies. The videos centered on learning different skills such as handcuffing, searching, and traffic stops. It was a very unique education for a 20-year-old right out of school.



I was one of the first 50 employees to work at the newly-constructed Moffitt Cancer Center. Hired to work in patient education, I was soon moved to being the medical photographer with an office in the morgue. Since my work has always been somewhat darkly romantic, I have heard all the comments on how my previous jobs influenced my creative vision!

I did eventually go on to work in the arts as an educator and curator at several area museums to make things in my life a little brighter.

How do you see Florida's support for the arts and artists?

I came to Tampa in 1982 to attend college. Back in that time, artists were working in historic Ybor City and the University area. Unfortunately, as tourism grew, the artists and many creative collectives were displaced from the historic districts. But artists are fortunate to have some great museums nearby, including the Tampa Museum of Art, the Museum of Fine Art-St. Petersburg, the Salvador Dali Museum, and the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art. All of these exhibit both local and international artists. Today, although Tampa lacks commercial galleries, there is a resurgence of independent spaces for artists. With that said, I work from my home/studio and represent my work locally.

Tampa Bay and St. Petersburg both have Arts Councils that support several opportunities and grants for artists. I have been very fortunate to receive multiple grants from the Arts Council of Hillsborough County and three fellowships from the State of Florida. In 2005, I was Tampa's Photographer Laureate for a year.

And you've done your part to improve the arts environment as a museum curator.

Intrigued by how artists get work into museum collections, I figured the best way to find out was to work in a museum. I love museum work because it is ever changing from exhibit to exhibit. The variety of events and the interaction with diverse groups of artists are memorable. I am fortunate that I had many different positions in various departments of several excellent museums. I can genuinely say I know the system from bottom to top, from painting baseboards to planning operational budgets.

Many artists and most civilians don't know much about a curator's role and responsibilities.

Working in a museum education department is not very different from teaching. You are presenting information to a variety of people with varying levels of skill, histories, and visions.

My first position in a museum was coordinating a part-time program for the Tampa Museum of Art called Club Art. Weekly, I would bring in an artist to speak to teenagers about the work they created and then lead a hands-on activity related to the artwork presented. That led to a position in the curatorial department as a curatorial assistant, where I assisted three curators. Next, I became community educator, leading outreach programs at the same museum (Tampa Museum). After gaining some experience, I went on to be the curator of education at the Polk Museum of Art in Lakeland.

When my parents became ill, I needed to be closer to Tampa, so I went down to a part-time job as an associate curator/registrar at the Leepa-Rattner Museum. Finally, I finished up my run in museums (I think) a year and a half ago as chief curator at the Art & History Museums - Maitland. The five museums that comprise the Art & History Museums – Maitland feature historical sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places and exhibition spaces. I was responsible for the conservation of the sites in addition to exhibitions, an artist residency program, and studio artists.

The painting professor you mentioned deserves, an "I told you so." Who from your past deserves a "Thank you?"

An early inspiration for me was my high school art teacher Robert Nelson. I remember his bringing in a pristine black leather portfolio box in ninth grade. He carefully put the case on a table and clicked

open the box to uncover flawless matted works of art. It was that moment I said to myself, "I want to do that." The care he handled his work with influenced me then and continues to speak to me today. I was fortunate that the school I attended was 7-12 grade, so Mr. Nelson was one of five instructors I studied with for six years. That alone was extremely important in my development as an artist.

More recently, I have been very fortunate to be mentored by a group from Creative Capital. They organize gatherings around the country that provide essential networking and collaboration-building opportunities, as well as connections to communities, cultural leaders, and supporters of the arts. Its mission states, "Creative Capital supports innovative and adventurous artists across the country through funding, counsel, gatherings, and career development services." It has been a great gift.



A word for us on the subject of tools, tricks, techniques?

I travel with a Sony A6000 mirrorless digital camera and an iPhone. I am always shooting photos that I can 'build' upon. I look for empty areas in the landscape, trees, and dramatic cloud formations.

All of my "elements" are organized by type in what I call my image morgue. So if I need a specific bird, I can find it in the animals file under birds

I would say 99.8 percent of everything I use I have shot over the last ten years. In that rare occasion, when I need something that I have not photographed, I will go to public domain images, usually through creative commons.

I work on a MacBook Pro with Photoshop and Lightroom. We have two large-format printers in the studio that I will output to. The only trick of the trade I use is to "keep experimenting."



What's next? Project? Show(s)? Travel? A book?

As I mentioned previously, I have been working with mentors from Creative Capital for several years. They have seen my work change and develop as I became a caregiver for my parents. With their encouragement, I am working to direct some of my experience as an artist/caregiver into a TED talk. Many artists are in the same situation as I have been, caring for aging parents, an ill child/spouse, or dealing with personal challenges. A critical need is there for artists to be able to maintain some sort of creative outlet while caring for others.

I have been awarded a residency at Hambidge in Georgia this coming October. I hope to work on my TED talk and create some new images. I am thinking of a book in the future, but I want to create something very unique and different, so I am not rushing into that. Also, I'm scheduled for two solo and one group exhibition in the fall and early 2020.

How can we stay in touch with you?

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